

Tips for Gaining Parental Support of Your Child Nutrition Program

Providing quality and nourishing meals in child care is extremely important for young children. Children need healthful meals to maintain healthy lifestyles and to grow and develop. However, providing meals in the child care facility is only half the battle. A second battle is gaining parental support, but this too can be easily achieved with a few simple steps.



Step 1: Learn and Implement the Best Practices for Parent Involvement

- The child care director and staff provide parents/guardians with education materials to establish their role in promoting and supporting good health.
- The child care director involves parents/guardians in health-related activities.
- The child care director offers parents/guardians access to education sessions and materials on nutrition for infants and young children.
- Child care staff collaborate with parents/guardians regarding the introduction of solid foods both at home and in the child care center.
- Child care staff collaborate with parents/guardians to overcome the challenges of feeding picky eaters.
- Parents/guardians are encouraged to provide feedback to the child care staff on the child care center menus.



Step 2: Inform and Educate Parents about the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Often parents are not involved in child care because they are unaware of the great things taking place on a day to day basis. Also, some parents are unaware of CACFP and why it's important to plan and serve healthy meals at home. Inform parents of the CACFP. Educate each parent on why you are participating in this program and the lifetime effects and benefits. Express to them that failing to implement healthy meals in the home can have a lifetime effect, increasing the chance of type 2 diabetes, obesity, and other health related illnesses.

Tips to Inform Parents

- Provide CACFP or nutrition related information for new parents enrolling in child care.
- Add a nutrition component to discuss during parent teacher conferences.
- Send out weekly text messages or tweets on Twitter, providing easy and quick menu ideas.
- Hold one-two minute conversations with parents as they are picking up their children.
- Create a center website, highlighting the different activities taking place on a daily basis.



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Step 3: Promote and Invite the Parents and the Community

Host a Parent Workshop

Hosting a workshop to educate parents about the CACFP can be very beneficial and rewarding for both young children and parents. If parents are aware of all of the benefits and dynamics of CACFP, parents may be influenced to implement the meal patterns while at home. An ideal way to do this workshop is to include all staff who implement the program. For example, the cook, the director, and the teacher discuss the role he or she plays in providing quality and healthful meals. This method can also assist the providers and parents with developing a closer relationship.



Healthy Choices in the Home Promise

Create a promise chart for parents to sign and promote it to the children, parents, and the community. Some examples of a promise include:

1. I, _____, promise to serve at least four healthy meals a week.
2. I, _____, promise to turn the television off at least three nights a week for extracurricular activities in the home.
3. I, _____, promise to add fruits and vegetables to the menu at least 5 times a week.

This is also a great opportunity to involve the media. Invite the local newspaper out to talk about the promise to promote/provide healthy choices in the home. Create a Facebook page or Twitter account highlighting the promise, encouraging parents to serve healthy choices in the home.

Distribute Parent Literature

Distributing nutrition related literature is extremely beneficial to both parents and young children. If space permits, place a variety of nutrition related literature on a small table near the front entrance.

Host a Parent Cook-Off

Host a Parent Cook-Off with the children serving as the judges. Select the items the parents can use to prepare the meals. If limited on space, host a cook-off that does not require using major kitchen appliances.



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Host Bring-a-Parent-to-Lunch Day

Host a Bring-a-Parent-to-Lunch Day and invite parents to have lunch with their children. This is a great time for parents to see the meals prepared for young children, the different conversations, and family style dining. During the luncheon, continue the daily routine. This will allow parents to see children in their day-to-day lunch routine. Some children may not be able to continue the normal routine with visitors in the classroom, but encourage the routine.



Daily Parent Note

Send home a daily note to parents listing the items their child ate during each mealtime. On the daily note, encourage parents to talk about the menu items served.

Fruits and Vegetables Social

Host a Fruits and Vegetables Social and invite parents and members of the community (Librarian, Mayor, Registered Dietitians, etc.). This is a great time to talk about the importance of implementing healthy meals in the home and in the community.

Resources for Success

There are several resources available on NFSMI's website to help educate parents. Check out the resources below.

Sample Letter to Parents on Teaching Children About Food

<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20100922094358.pdf>

Parents' Guide to CACFP in Child Care Centers

<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20091012010938.pdf>

Parents Guide to CACFP in Family Child Care Homes

<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20090702092253.pdf>

Parents and Child Care Providers – Partners in Good Nutrition

<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20090702092435.pdf>

Tips for Introducing Solid Foods

<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20100922102535.pdf>

Sample Letter to Parents on Family Style Meals

<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20100916045241.pdf>

Sample Letter to Parents on Infant Feeding and the CACFP

<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20100916045030.pdf>

Parents are Key

Remember, parents are a primary key to instilling healthy lifelong eating habits for young children. Child nutrition is a team approach. If you have the parents, teachers, and community involved, young children have greater chances of implementing healthy choices for a lifetime.



Sources

Lofton, K. & Nettles, M. F. (2010). *Ready, Set, Go! Creating and Maintaining a Wellness Environment in Child Care Centers Participating in the CACFP*. University, MS: National Food Service Management Institute.

National Food Service Management Institute. (2012). *CARE connection*. Retrieved from <http://www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=199>

Nutrition Highlights

The CACFP Sponsor's Association

The CACFP Sponsor's Association (TSA) will host their 26th Annual Conference on September 20-22, 2012, in Austin, Texas at the Hilton Austin. This year's theme is "CACFP is FUNDamental". The keynote speakers are Dr. Janice Fletcher, Dr. Laurel Branen in the Pre-Conference Workshop and Dr. Kathryn Henderson in the general sessions. Also, NFSMI will complete a session on Saturday September 22, 2012 at 10:30-11:40 in Room 140. Register today at <http://www.cacfp.org/conference.asp#info>

NFSMI Trainings

NFSMI has a variety of online child care courses available. All online courses are free of charge and can be accessed at any time. Check out our online courses by following the link: <http://www.nfsmi.org/Templates/TemplateDefault.aspx?qs=cELEPTIzNg==>

National Message

USDA 2010 Dietary Guidelines Communications Message Calendar, the theme for September–December is *Foods to Increase*. During this time, the selected key message is "Make at least half your grains whole grains". Remember the theme and selected message when planning activities. To obtain more information, follow the link at <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/Publications/MyPlate/CommunicationsMessageCalendar.pdf>



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